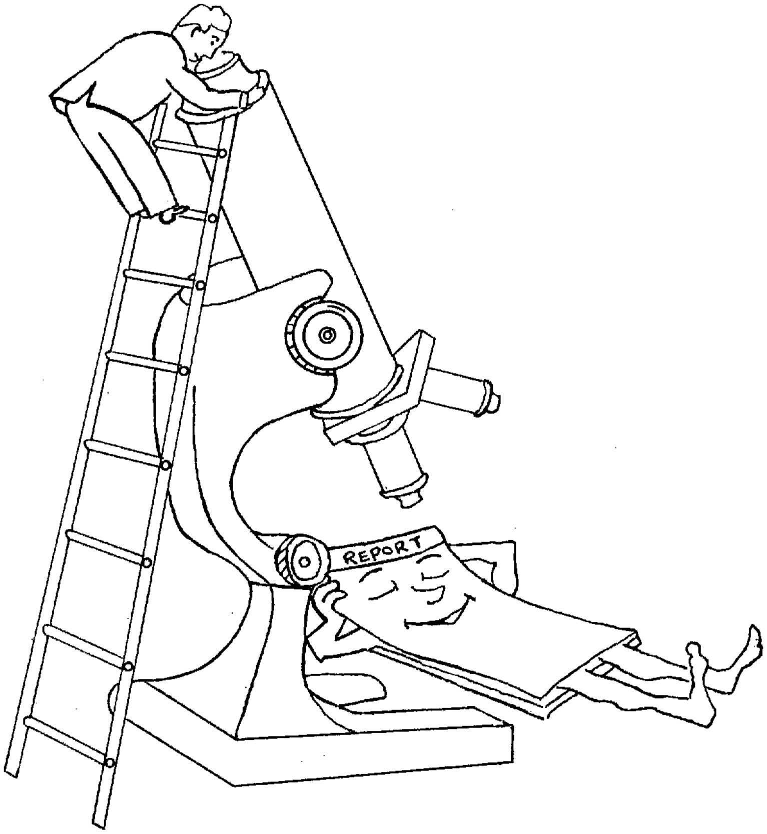
ANALYZING

REQUIREMENTS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE OR MANAGEMENT

REPORTS



MANAGEMENT STAFF
RECORDS MANAGEMENT DIVISION

NOVEMBER 1954

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INTRODUCTION

A sage old fire chief at a large naval base was being questioned about fire regulations. "What about reporting fire hazards?" he was asked. "If you mean in writing, heck no!" he replied (but probably in somewhat stronger terms). And he added, "By the time I got the word the darn place would be burned down!"

The Chief didn't know it, but he was practicing reports management. Simple and direct reporting of essential information was what he wanted. And it paid off, judging from his excellent fire prevention record.

Unfortunately, most Agency requirements for reports cannot be stated as simply, nor complied with so easily. Extensive activity requiring administrative or management control, a complex organization, and changing conditions tend to complicate the reporting picture. Thus an analysis of your reporting requirements is essential--at the time they are created and periodically thereafter. Here is your guide.

This pamphlet is not a complete course in reports analysis. Instead, it is a collection of what might be termed "thought starters," to create a consciousness of the keys to sound reporting, and to serve as a check list during your analysis. Additional copies may be obtained from the Reports and Correspondence Management Branch, Management Staff.

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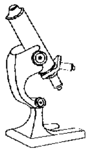
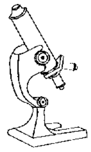
ANALYZING REQUIREMENTS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE AND MANAGEMENT REPORTS



PLANNING YOUR ANALYSIS

Analyzing requirements for reports is simply applying the logic: If the information isn't needed, don't ask for it. If a report is necessary, assure that only essential data is compiled and submitted by the simplest and most direct means.

But significant results cannot be achieved by hit or miss tactics. A planned analysis is necessary. Reports that are interrelated must be studied together. Some are alike according to the functions they serve or the subjects they cover. Others, sometimes called "feeder reports" are only small segments of a reporting network designed to provide top management with a single document of information. The relationship of these "feeders" to the end product must be considered.



QUESTIONING THE BASIC NEED FOR A REPORT

Is there a sound need for the report as a whole as well as for every item in the report? Consider these questions in making your decision...

- Is the information reported, appropriate to the assigned functions, responsibilities, or authority of the component requiring it?
- Does the report serve a purpose which could be accomplished some other way, such as through direct supervision or inspection?
- Does the need for the report result from an organizational or procedural problem which should be corrected rather than reported?
- Can the requiring office obtain the same information from another source or in a different format or manner, e.g., a copy of another report, a machine tabulation from punched cards maintained for another component, or copies of operating documents?
- Is the information reported actually and actively used as a basis for actions, plans, or decisions, and do these uses fully justify the cost required to prepare the report? Or asked another way--is full use being made of the information, or is it being gathered because "it's nice to know," or because some day there may be a use for it?

ANSWERING THE NEED

ESSENTIALS OF A GOOD REPORTING REQUIREMENT - Let's assume you're sure a report is needed in its entirety. That's a good start; but there are many other aspects of reporting that must be considered. Check for these...

Reporting Frequency - The reporting frequency must be consistent with the frequency with which the information is used. More frequent reporting is not justifiable. Furthermore, the frequency between each report should be of such length that significant changes are reflected. Programs on which information is reported often decelerate rapidly. Unless changed, the reporting frequency soon becomes unrealistic. Then too, the opposite may occur--the pace of a program is stepped up, or situations begin to happen so frequently that they should be summarized, rather than reported separately. Check a series of reports. What frequency is needed now; what is the trend?

Due Date - The date a report is due in an office should, if possible, be one convenient to the reporting activity. End-of-month, end-of-quarter, and end-of-year reporting should be avoided if possible since reporting workloads are heaviest at these times. Moreover, due dates should be based on working days, not calendar days. Determine the number of times the preparing office was unable to meet the due date. Also, how many times did a due date disrupt office routine to the detriment of operations? Was overtime ever required to meet the date?

Report Format

A good report format should meet these criteria...

- Be simple in design, and standard for each preparing activity.
- Provide for transmitting the report without covering correspondence.
- Be arranged so that the report can be prepared from records normally maintained by the preparing activities, yet designed to permit the recipient to locate information readily and apply it to his needs.

One of the surest ways to meet these criteria is to require that the report be submitted on an Agency form. Consider these additional advantages...

- Reports submitted on forms can be readily identified thus speeding their routing, processing, filing, and ultimate disposition (from a records retirement standpoint).
- Instructions for preparing and submitting the report can be placed on the form for ready reference.

However, the fact that a report presently is being submitted on an Agency form does not exclude its format from a reappraisal. Requirements for information change. The format satisfactory yesterday may be inadequate today. For example...

- Is there sufficient space in each box for fill-in?
- Is the form printed on such heavy stock that the number of legible copies needed cannot be made at one typing?
- Are reports prepared in such volume that carbon interleaved snap-out sets would be advantageous?
- If copies are duplicated, do the masters (stencil, Ditto, multilith, etc.) contain the maximum amount of preprinted data?

Report Directive - Requirements for reports should be established by clear and complete written directives. Good directives mean good reporting! Consider these points...

PROVIDING A SINGLE SOURCE OF INSTRUCTIONS	Cancel all previous directives which required the report, incorporating necessary past instructions in the new directive as an aid to personnel preparing reports.
PURPOSE AND USE	State clearly the purposes or uses of the data being collected. The Office which prepares the report needs to know the purposes and uses to (1) assure that the data reported will accomplish the objectives intended, and (2) make more accurate decisions in doubtful cases.
REPORT TITLE	Indicate the correct title of the report for later identification. Titles should be descriptive of contents.
DUE DATE OF REPORT	Specify the date on which the report is to arrive at its destination. For situation reports, specify how soon the report must be received after occurrence of the event. Establish a due date for a recurring report which allows the reporting workload to be more evenly distributed by the offices preparing and receiving the report.

PERIOD OR SITUATION COVERED	Specify the period of time, 'as of' date, or precise situation to be covered by the report. If data from several different reports are to be correlated, assure that the periods covered in these reports are comparable.
FIRST SUBMISSION OF THE REPORT	Specify when the requirement becomes effective, such as the date that the first recurring report is to be received, or the first period to be covered.
TERMINATION OF REPORT	For a temporary report, specify exactly when it is to be discontinued.
PREPARING ACTIVITIES	State specifically the types of activities which are to prepare the report.
DISTRIBUTION	Specify the number of copies to be prepared. Specify where each copy is to be sent.
FORMAT (IF NO FORM IS PROVIDED)	Specify the format for the items to be reported to (1) help insure uniformity in data reported and (2) simplify the transcription, comparison, evaluation, or other use of the data when it is received.
USE OF FORM	Be sure the form includes information on where the report is to be forwarded, and from whom it is sent ('from' and 'to' information), in order to avoid use of separate transmittal correspondence. Request offices not to submit covering transmittal correspondence with reports prepared on forms. Specify where preparing offices are to secure supplies of the form, and the requisitioning procedure.
SOURCE OF DATA	Specify the source from which the information is to be obtained to (1) assist the preparing office in easy compilation, and (2) insure comparable data from all activities.

PROCEDURES FOR COMPILING	Specify recommended procedures for obtaining and compiling the data. This will (1) aid preparing offices to use the best methods, and (2) insure accuracy and consistency of the report.
WORDING	Give clear instructions on each item to be reported. Use simple active or imperative verbs (as 'Enter the total cost...'). Give only one instruction in a single sentence. Keep the sentence concise. Be sure that the instructions can be interpreted in only one way.

Need for Copies - A positive as well as a negative approach must be taken in determining the need. For instance, assure that all who have an interest in the report are receiving sufficient copies. Also, do the recipients have any recommendations for improving the report. On the other hand, copies of reports are costly. They increase the volume of records our Agency must handle, store, and dispose of. They slow down report preparation procedures. One extra copy can double typing and proofreading time if that copy makes two typing runs necessary. Check to make sure that every copy provided is serving a useful purpose. Ask recipients...

✓ Do they wish to remain on distribution?

✓ Can they obtain similar data from another source?

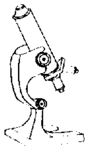
✓ Is all the data utilized? If not, which can be eliminated?

Consider the cost of each copy. Count your copies; make your copies count!

PREPARING AND SUBMITTING REPORTS - Methods of preparing and submitting reports are almost as varied as there are types of reports. However, here are a few pointers having general application.

- Are files and other records arranged in such a manner that data can be readily extracted?
- Do fiscal and other accounting records contain control totals so that the accuracy of detailed data can be checked?
- Can fiscal and other accounting data be maintained on a cumulative basis to eliminate last minute workloads?

- For historical, progress, and other documentary-type reporting, is a brief running account of significant events and accomplishments maintained to avoid trying to "think back" over the period?
- Do graphs and charts reflect cumulative data? This is, is information added to the same reproducible master each reporting period?
- Do reproduction masters (Ditto, multilith, stencil, etc.) contain the maximum amount of preprinted data?
- Can data be recorded for photographic reporting, e.g., maintained currently on flex-o-line strips, "menu boards," or production control boards?
- Can machine tabulation procedures be used?
- Are reports that are self explanatory forwarded without transmittal correspondence? Reports are considered self explanatory if submitted on forms containing spaces for 'To,' 'From,' and the signature of the signing official.



SUMMARY

1. Plan your analysis, keeping in mind those reports that are interrelated.
2. Determine management's basic needs for reports.
3. Assure that the following essentials of a good reporting requirement answer these needs...

   ✓ Realistic reporting frequency.

   ✓ Practical due date.

   ✓ Efficient format.

   ✓ Clear and complete written directive.

   ✓ Realistic requirements for copies.
4. Ensure that reports are prepared and submitted by the most efficient means.

If these points are considered, you can be assured of...

FEWER REPORTS, BETTER REPORTS, AT LESS COST!